



WASHOE COUNTY

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STAFF REPORT
BOARD MEETING DATE: July 26, 2016

DATE: July 1, 2016
TO: Board of County Commissioners
FROM: Amber Howell, Director of Social Services
(775) 785-8600 ahowell@washoecounty.us
Dave Solaro, Director, Community Services Department
(775) 328-3624 dsolaro@washoecounty.us
THROUGH: Kevin Schiller, Assistant County Manager

SUBJECT: Recommendation to authorize staff to proceed with the selection of a building for use by the Child Protective Services as a family visitation center and authorize the Director of Social Services, Director of Community Services, and the District Attorney's office to negotiate a potential acquisition; provide up to \$20,000 of a refundable earnest deposit for the building of interest; and if approved authorize the Director of Community Services to approve any due diligence needed including a Phase I environmental study, appraisal, and inspections necessary up to \$21,000[deposit plus Phase 1 not to exceed \$41,000]; and if the acquisition is acceptable staff shall return to the Board of County Commissioners for review of the terms and final approval of the acquisition. (All Commission Districts)

SUMMARY

It is recommended that the Board of County Commissioners (Board) authorize the selection of an appropriate property in order to facilitate a more family friendly environment, where families can visit with their children in foster care. It is the goal of Washoe County Department of Social Services (WCDSS) to preserve families whenever possible. The visitation center will allow for families and staff to work together in a non-office setting, creating a safe, family friendly, home-like environment for families to grow and learn, while they transition through their child's safety plan.

Strategic Objective supported by this item: Safe, Secure and Healthy Communities.

PREVIOUS ACTION

No previous action taken.

AGENDA ITEM # B.K.2

BACKGROUND

WCDSS has occupied space in an office building at 350 South Center Street for approximately 14 years. Office space was set aside for families to visit with children who have been placed in foster care.

As Washoe County's foster care caseloads have increased, so has the strain on the resources needed to serve our families. With little space to house visiting families, they are often left to visit in the hallways and lobbies of the office building. Social Services has been actively seeking an alternative to this situation, which led to the idea of providing our families with a family friendly environment, away from the small rooms and offices at 350 South Center.

A child care facility with playground or play area location, with adequate parking on an established bus route is preferred. A child care facility would be closely equipped to the ideal configuration for conducting visitations. The concept for scheduling visitation at the center includes family visits that would be facilitated, monitored and supervised by trained foster parent facilitators and volunteers. The Department practices a visitation model that engages both the child's natural family caregivers (biological parents) and their substitute caregivers - often foster parents or relatives. This practice is based on a model developed by the University of Delaware known as Attachment and Bio-behavioral Catch-Up for Visitation or ABC-V. This visitation practice has been studied and implemented through the Youth Law Center at the Department with very positive results such as reducing the number of placements and decreasing the time to reunification. As required, the first 5 visits for the ABC-V cases would remain at the current 350 S. Center Child Welfare location so that the assigned Social Worker, Human Support Specialist and Foster Parent could still assess safety provide the information and parent training for ABC-V and to ensure appropriate observation and open communication. The first 5 visits generally take place within 2-3 weeks of removal of the child from the home, at which time, if deemed appropriate, the visits could be transitioned to the visitation center as an offsite option for families and foster parents.

While a facility of this type would be an ideal option, there are other options that would be comparable to meet the needs of a visitation center. "Must Haves" include open space with bathrooms, kitchen, outdoor playground(s), and other rooms that could be tailored to different aged children; space for a teen room with age appropriate furniture and TV, video games, etc, and an infant nursery. The ideal location would include space to house the "clothing closet", where clothing, backpacks, personal items and other donations could be stored and distributed, with the help of foster parents, seniors and other volunteer groups. The visitation space would generally be open space with different areas dedicated to family groups or open play, based on activities allowed and age groups. The children would be able to interact with family and play where the entire family unit feels comfortable and relaxed. It is important that visitation is held in a neutral, non-threatening atmosphere, where families and children can act normally. Sometimes space is important to keep distance between people, as the family dynamics are often strained. As part of ABC-V the parents would be encouraged to spend quality time with their children, playing and "following the lead of the child."

FISCAL IMPACT

The FY 2017-2022 adopted Capital Improvement Program contains this project in an amount of \$585,000. Should a property be selected, funding for the refundable earnest money is available in the FY 17 adopted budget in the Indigent Fund. Costs for due diligence related to acquisition of property for Washoe County in the past have averaged \$15,000 to \$21,000 depending on the initial condition of the properties. No additional budget augmentations or amendments are necessary.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board of County Commissioners authorize staff to proceed with the selection of a building for use by the Child Protective Services as a family visitation center and authorize the Director of Social Services, Director of Community Services, and the District Attorney's office to negotiate a potential acquisition; provide up to \$20,000 of a refundable earnest deposit for the building of interest; and if approved authorize the Director of Community Services to approve any due diligence needed including a Phase I environmental study, appraisal, and inspections necessary up to \$21,000[deposit plus Phase 1 not to exceed \$41,000]; and if the acquisition is acceptable staff shall return to the Board of County Commissioners for review of the terms and final approval of the acquisition.

POSSIBLE MOTION

If the Board of County Commissioner's support this property selection a possible motion would be, "Move to authorize staff to proceed with the selection of a building for use by the Child Protective Services as a family visitation center and authorize the Director of Social Services, Director of Community Services, and the District Attorney's office to negotiate a potential acquisition; provide up to \$20,000 of a refundable earnest deposit for the building of interest; and if approved authorize the Director of Community Services to approve any due diligence needed including a Phase I environmental study, appraisal, and inspections necessary up to \$21,000[deposit plus Phase 1 not to exceed \$41,000]; and if the acquisition is acceptable staff shall return to the Board of County Commissioners for review of the terms and final approval of the acquisition."